

mass media

June 2018



in Moldova

Eforturi
internationale
Remarcabile
din R. Moldova
pând cu aprilie 2018
de "consolidare"
protecție a martorilor
de trafic de ființe

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The Solidarity March Ignored by Authorities



On 3 May, dozens of journalists and civil society representatives participated in the solidarity march organized by the Independent Journalism Center to kick off Press Freedom Days in Moldova. The demonstrators marched to the offices of Parliament, the Presidency, the government and the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) to hand them the Memorandum on Press Freedom in the Republic of Moldova for 3 May 2017–3 May 2018. The document highlighted problems faced by journalists. Since none of the political higher-ups decided to personally come out and speak with the media, copies of the memorandum were left in the mailboxes of Parliament and the government, and two more copies were handed to representatives of the President and the BCC. In front of Parliament the demonstrators chanted, “Freedom for the press! No to manipulation! No to press monopolies,” and other slogans.

The Executive Director of the Independent Journalism Center, Nadine Gogu, said, “I expected the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Andrian Candu, to talk to the media. I hoped we could have at least one discussion a year on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. Unfortunately, he chose not to talk to the journalists which is why I left a copy of the Memorandum on Press Freedom that includes a year’s worth of information in Parliament’s mailbox. I hope Mr. Candu will receive and read it and that the authorities will take into account the recommendations drafted by a number of media outlets.”

The march proceeded to the Presidency as demonstrators continued to chant slogans about counteracting Russian propaganda, manipulation, misinformation and media

concentration. There the demonstrators were met by a representative who informed them that the president had left on official business. Photojournalist Constantin Grigorita, who was banned from events organized by President Dodon nearly one year ago, was among the protesters. Grigorita believes that freedom of the press in Moldova started to deteriorate back in 2017 when journalists had to obtain credentials; some them have yet to receive their permits.

As was the case at Parliament, the participants had to leave a copy of the memorandum in the government’s mailbox with no chance to talk to representatives.

In front of the BCC building the demonstrators urged the council not to serve “mafia interests.” The Head of the General Directorate for Licensing, Authorization, and Monitoring, Lia Gutu, came out to meet the press and mentioned that the BCC would most likely comment on the memorandum at the next meeting.

Special reporter at the Association of Independent Press, Lilia Zaharia, stated, “We were not surprised by this ignorance. We have been facing obstacles in obtaining access to information for several years now. Last year they tried to conceal the names of individuals on trial; this information is very useful to journalists. The freedom of the press in Moldova has seriously regressed over the last couple of years affecting both independent media outlets and consumers since journalists are the public’s mouthpiece.”

The President of the Center for Investigative Journalism, Cornelia Cozonac, said, “Unfortunately, the general state

of the press has worsened. On one hand, this is because we as journalists are unable to fight for our freedom. Some of us have accepted working in the party-affiliated press, in press monopolies, or in press institutions that misinform and fail to do their jobs professionally. Government

officials feel confident because they have their own press and can manipulate obedient journalists. They can afford to ignore information requests from reporters which has been a major problem for the last couple of years. Access to information has declined.”

Journalists Named the Least Press-Friendly Institutions. The Presidency Ranked First

A total of 23 media publishers were polled in a survey organized by the Independent Journalism Center to identify the institutions that violate the Law on Access to Information most often. Publishers were asked to name three institutions that either failed to reply within the time period stipulated by law or that offered very broad, vague replies. Journalists also indicated the motives cited by state agencies for their behavior. The presidency was mentioned eight times and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection was cited six times. Third place went to the State Tax Service (four times). The Office of the Mayor of Chisinau Municipality and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research were mentioned three times while institutions mentioned twice included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, the Security

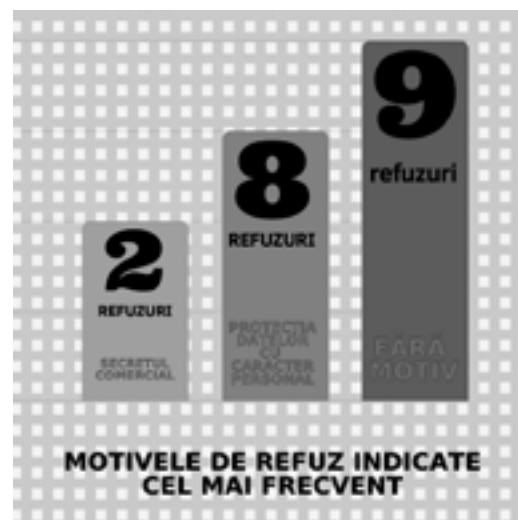
and Intelligence Service, courts of law, the Ministry of Justice, the General Prosecutor’s Office, the State Chancellery and the Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure. Protection of personal data proved to be the most popular reason (cited in eight cases). Trade secrets were invoked twice.

The following media outlets participated in the survey: TV8; Pro TV Chisinau; TVR Moldova; Radio Europa Liberă; newspapers *Capital Market*, *Jurnal de Chisinau*, *Ziarul de Garda*, *Northern Observer*, *SP*, *Moldova Curată*, *RISE Moldova*, *Mold-street*, *NewsMaker*, *Crime Moldova*, *Sanatate INFO*, *Bizlaw*, *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Gazeta de Sud*; and Unimedia, Agora.md, Deschide.md, the Center for Investigative Journalism, and moldNova.eu.

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The institutions that violate the Law on Access to Information most often: The State Tax Service - four times; the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection (MSMPs) - six times; the Presidency - eight times.



Most frequently cited reasons for refusal: trade secret was invoked twice; personal data protection - in eight cases; no reply was offered at all in nine cases.

Ways to Combat Fake News at the European and International Levels

“Preventing and identifying the way disinformation works also calls for a profound and careful process of discernment. We need to unmask what could be called the ‘snake tactics’ used by those who disguise themselves in order to strike at any time and place. This was the strategy employed by the ‘crafty serpent’ in the Book of Genesis who at the dawn of humanity created the first fake news...”^[1] (Pope Francis, 24 January 2018).

The Pontiff dedicated his annual speech on 2018 World Social Communication Day to the fake news phenomenon. It has been discussed a lot in recent years but is actually as old as humanity as the Pope reminded us. Virtual space is now the most conducive environment for spreading fakes due to the Internet’s unrestricted freedom. This freedom is also being used to (re)confirm the genesis of the human being as humans are prone to sin. Meanwhile, however, some people are trying to make things right by drafting and applying various strategies and actions for combating and removing fakes. As it is difficult to quantify the efficiency of these strategies, it is more appropriate to count the number of fakes that have been detected and ignored by consumers. It is worth knowing that several countries are acting to combat this phenomenon.

In the UK, for example, both scientific and journalistic approaches to the problem have been applied in practice. Researchers from Cambridge University have created a game called Bad News ^[2] that is designed to help the audience detect false news and understand its implications. Players are integrated among virtual users and modify the truth in the information they distribute, trying to maintain their credibility. Likewise, the BBC included exposing fakes among the priorities in its 2018–2019 Annual Work Plan^[3] and launched an online interactive game called BBC iReporter to help children and adolescents identify fake news. Available on a mobile phone, tablet, or computer, the game involves participants in a continuous process of choosing

information sources; depending on their credibility, the course of the game is affected.^[4] The BBC also frequently organizes school visits for journalists to talk about and explain to young people what fake news means and how they can protect themselves against it. BBC managers believe that public media has a great responsibility to counter fake news.^[5] At the beginning of 2018, the British government announced the creation of a special unit to combat fake news and to discourage disinformation campaigns from other states.^[6]

At the end of 2017, Germany adopted a law^[7] prohibiting fake news and the dissemination of hate speech online with fines for those who do not delete such content within 24 hours of up to EUR 50 million. In Italy, the Police Commissariat established a section called “Segnala online fake news” (Report fake news) on the institution’s website during the 2018 spring election campaign so citizens could warn others about the publication of fake news, indicating where it was published and contact details. After conducting research, Italian policemen informed petitioners and warned online platforms and social network managers about the measures they had taken.^[8] There is also an online platform that removes fake news and disinformation from Italian media.^[9] The President of France proposed and endorsed the approval of a law prohibiting fake news dissemination online during election periods and beyond. The latest opinion poll among French information consumers revealed that people agreed both to adopt an anti-

[1] Speech available here: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html

[2] The game is available here: <https://www.getbadnews.com/#intro>

[3] The plan is available here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/inside-thebbc/howwework/reports/annual_plan_2018

[4] The game is available here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/iddt-8760dd58-84f9-4c98-ade2-590562670096>

[5] <http://mediacritica.md/ro/bbc-lansat-un-joc-interactiv-pentru-combaterea-fake-news/>

[6] <http://mediacritica.md/ro/marea-britanie-anunta-crearea-unei-unitati-speciale-pentru-combaterea-stirilor-false/>

[7] Available here: <https://www.buzer.de/s1.htm?g=Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz%20-%20NetzDG&f=1>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/05/tough-new-german-law-puts-tech-firms-and-free-speech-in-spotlight>

[8] Lilia Zaharia. Italia: Segnala online Fake news!, available at: <http://mediacritica.md/ro/italia-segnala-online-fake-news/>

[9] <http://www.butac.it/>; Lilia Zaharia. Italia: Segnala online Fake news!, available at: <http://mediacritica.md/ro/italia-segnala-online-fake-news/>

fake-news law (80%),^[10] and to establish an independent public authority to review the information distributed on the Internet.^[11]

As a supranational institution, the European Union is alert to the fake news and disinformation phenomena of recent years. Eurobarometer data from November 2016 revealed that Europeans had less confidence in media and had doubts about media independence.^[12] Therefore in June 2017, the European Parliament adopted a resolution^[13] calling on the European Commission to analyze the fake news phenomenon in depth, including from a legal perspective. It also called for reviewing the possibility of legislative intervention to limit the dissemination of false content. The commission included this initiative into its 2018 work plan.^[14] In November 2017, the institution launched a public consultation^[15] on fake news and disinformation and created a High Level Expert Group consisting of 39 representatives from academia, traditional and online media, and civil society organizations.^[16] Concerned citizens including those outside the European Union could also attend the consultations. Based on the expert group's report published in March 2018^[17] entitled "Fake News and Online Disinformation" published in April 2018,^[18] (proposing, inter alia, to replace the term "fake news" with "disinformation"), and on a study conducted by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission,^[19] the institution proposed several actions to combat disinformation and fake news in the virtual environment:

- Draft, approve and publish a common code of good practice on disinformation by July 2018.
- Establish an independent European network of verifiers of the truthfulness of information.
- Establish a secure online European platform on disinformation to support the network of verifiers.
- Improve media literacy, including organizing a European media education week.
- Promote quality journalism through the publication of diverse and pluralist information, among others.^[20]

Furthermore, in February 2018 in the run-up to the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, in the list of general recommendations the commission included one saying that, "Based on Member States' experience, look for best practices in identifying, mitigating and managing risks related to the electoral process that are generated by cyber-attacks and disinformation."^[21] There was no consensus reached on a legislative intervention to fight the fake news phenomenon, but it was agreed to have common measures at the community level.

Another joint initiative was adopted by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the France Presse Agency (AFP), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and the Global Editors Network (GEN). They recently launched a self-regulatory proposal against disinformation, called the "Journalism Trust Initiative" that initiated an open consultation aimed at defining high-quality journalism standards and identifying/labelling quality media institutions.^[22] In addition, several countries verify facts on portals that continually publish analytical material, comments, or explanations of certain events. Examples are www.faktograf.hr in Croatia, Les Décodeurs in France, and www.correctiv.org in Germany.^[23]

In Germany, a team of journalists called Faktenfinder was created to focus on the disinformation phenomenon. Another example is the RTL Group that created a verification team from different countries plus a number of partner organizations trained to verify videos. Group members

[10] <https://francais.rt.com/france/47215-sondages-plus-plus-confiants-democratie-francais-loi-anti-fake-news>

[11] Les français et les fake news. Available here: <https://www.bva-group.com/sondages/francais-fake-news/>

[12] Special Eurobarometer 452: Media pluralism and democracy, available here: [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/ebs_452_en%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/ebs_452_en%20(1).pdf)

[13] 2016/2276(INI) Online platforms and the digital single market

[14] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/european-commission-adopts-2018-work-programme-2017-oct-24_en

[15] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/public-consultation-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

[16] <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/experts-appointed-high-level-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation>

[17] <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Amulti-dimensionalapproachtodisinformationReportoftheindependentHighlevelGrouponfakeneewsandonlinedisinformation.pdf>

[18] file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/fl_464_sum_en.pdf

[19] Study available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/digital-transformation-news-media-and-rise-disinformation-and-fake-news>

[20] CE press release of 28 April 2018, available here: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3370_ro.htm

[21] <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-32018H0234&qid=1524217766325&from=EN>

[22] <https://rsf.org/en/news/rsf-and-its-partners-unveil-journalism-trust-initiative-combat-disinformation>

[23] <http://faktograf.hr/2018/04/05/plenkovic-europska-unija-eu-euroskpticizam/>; <https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/>; <https://correctiv.org/>

also regularly test new tools that help identify fake videos and photos.^[24] At the European level, the CrossCheck Platform initiated by France works with partners from any concerned European country,^[25] and RefugeeCheck brings together teams of information verifiers from Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the UK to remove fake topics about refugees in the EU.^[26] At the international level, a similar platform called the International Fact-Checking Network has been opened for collaboration and has adopted a Code of Principles signed by the world's largest verifiers.^[27]

The United States has repeatedly declared itself to be the primary victim of fake news and relies heavily on media literacy, assigning teachers a key role in this process. A California teacher developed his own version of the game "Simon Says" in which students have three minutes to read a news item and decide whether it is true or fake.^[28] They

[24] <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Amulti-dimensionalapproachtodisinformation-ReportoftheindependentHighlevelGrouponfakenewsandonlinedisinformation.pdf>

[25] <https://crosscheck.firstdraftnews.org/france-fr/>

[26] <https://www.poynter.org/news/refugeecheck-europe-wide-fact-checking-initiative>

[27] <https://www.poynter.org/international-fact-checking-network-fact-checkers-code-principles>

[28] <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/02/16/514364210/5-ways-teachers-are-fighting-fake-news>

also count on services that verify information such as www.factcheck.org, www.politifact.com or www.snopes.com. Last but not least, Google introduced the Google News verification option in 2016 allowing editors to highlight verified content. The app was later extended to Google Search.

While professionals from all over the world are looking for solutions to eliminate the harmful fake news phenomenon, Pope Francis says:

The best antidotes to falsehoods are not strategies but people: people who are not greedy but ready to listen, people who make the effort to engage in sincere dialogue so that the truth can emerge, people who are attracted by goodness and take responsibility for how they use language.^[29]

We hope that strategies developed by people of good faith will contribute to the accountability of all who use language.

Aneta GONTA

[29] Speech available here: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html

Gratification: a Poisoned Apple for Journalists or an Innate Public Relations Tool?

In the autumn of 2015, I participated in a regional conference in Bucharest as part of the group of Moldovan journalists. A Romanian businessman (former Moldovan politician) had read on Facebook that we were there and contacted one of my colleagues, inviting us for a beer for old times' sake since he knew the majority of us. After the invitation, some of us naturally started checking our plans for the night. The first one to react was the head of a newspaper: "If we go, the place cannot be not very expensive so that we can pay for our beers ourselves. Who knows, maybe one day he will return to Moldovan politics..."

Coincidentally, the said businessman was running for the position of Prime Minister of Moldova three months later. He lost, but during the election the press was rummaging through his biography, creating a profile of his integrity, and writing about his assets and businesses. Obviously, nothing kept the journalists who had had a beer with the politician from writing something unpleasant about him, but it was probably somewhat awkward for them to expose his sins knowing that he had paid for their drinks.

What is the point of this example? Attention to details/factors that could compromise journalists and undermine their credibility were so deeply rooted in the newspaper chief that he thought ahead and took precautions, sometimes unnecessary ones. Of course, beer drinking had no direct connection to writing about the person, but this situation could have evolved as follows:

1. When his personal interests (including running for prime minister) were involved, the businessman might call his good pals and ask them to ignore certain facts when writing about him.
2. Journalists could opt for self-censorship for the sake of good relations.
3. Someone could have seen them together and misinterpreted the meeting. Even if everyone had paid for their drinks, a fastidious media consumer who trusts and ex-

pects a lot from certain journalists could construe such a meeting as offensive or compromising.

Here is another case: The editorial office told me that the National Integrity Commission (NIC) was offering several journalists a visit to its Romanian counterpart to see its work and the integrity of the inspectors. My colleague who had been speaking with the NIC representative asked straight away who was paying for the trip. We accepted the offer only after finding out that the visit was funded by the United Nations Development Programme to help improve the skills of journalists and NIC staff in investigating issues of public servants' integrity. If we had gone at the expense of the NIC, would our critical articles about this institution have been trustworthy at all?

Integrity Vaccine

Over the years, the Moldovan press from the university classroom to the editorial office never got a chance to get an injection of integrity. Basically, reporters do not know that a cup of coffee after a press conference (some cannot live more than an hour without drinking something) is one thing, but accepting generous and ongoing "courtesies" like paid trips and luxury hotel rooms is quite another. Our press became independent overnight and abruptly started to work under the new rules so is not the one to blame. Deontology was not in the picture 20 years ago. The majority of us did not learn it at university; instead, we were mastering norms on the run, guided rather by rules of common sense and good faith. Romania went through the same transition (totalitarian regime to independence and a free press) and has been having similar problems as several cases of journalists' gratification have been reported there in recent years.

In 2007,^[1] Danone Company was hit with a scandal related to the presence of a toxic substance in its products and invited a group of journalists to show them the production processes at the factory. As they left, each journalist got a

[1] http://www.cji.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/9_-PR-si-jurnalism_-Unde-trasam-granita.pdf

goody bag and a mobile phone, and only one journalist returned the gift. This attempt at corruption fueled a reaction in the press, and soon after the company's PR manager was fired though no one knows if it was directly related to the way the 'dioxin crisis' was dealt with.

Now, fortunately, journalists have all the materials they need at hand, and public debates on these topics exist as well. The copious offline meetings that previously were in style among politicians and ministers proved to be informationally sterile and corruptive for journalists. The Moldovan Journalist Code of Ethics contains provisions related to treats and trips, and western media's codes of ethics and other best practices are available online and offer journalists a chance to obtain information.

Most rules of conduct in large editorial offices around the world allow journalists to participate in lavish events paid for by the companies or institutions they are writing about only when such events are newsworthy. "In the course of gathering news, journalists are often invited to breakfasts, luncheons or dinners. As long as such occasions are newsworthy, it may be appropriate to accept the hospitality provided it is within reason. We do not accept 'junkets'—events that have little if any value to our newsgathering such as an invitation to a free holiday, an evening's entertainment or a sporting event at the expense of a news source. Accepting such hospitality when there is no news value might well be seen to create an unreasonable obligation to the source," according to the Reuters Handbook of Journalism.^[2] The BBC Editorial Guidelines^[3] mention: "We should not normally accept expense-paid trips unless they are the only way to cover a significant event, such as an inaugural flight or voyage or military operation."

When PR Journalism Turns into Corruption

Any agreement (implicit or explicit) with a source can affect a journalist's independence as reporters might be loath to criticize the source and instead treat issues in a more favorable way since they could feel obliged not to throw rocks at an entity that had hosted them or kindly paid for a trip. This results in a lack of credibility as the reporter can be seen as a court employee trotted out especially for writing nice things.

[2] <https://www.trust.org/contentAsset/raw-data/652966ab-c90b-4252-b4a5-db8ed1d438ce/file>

[3] downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Section_14_Editoria_Integrity.pdf

Most European codes of ethics contain provisions on journalists' gratification; all of them focus on the notion of credibility. A journalist must refuse any influence that might affect his or her or the guild's credibility:

"Journalists and publishers shall not perform any activities that could cast doubt on the credibility of the press." – German Press Code.^[4]

"Journalists shall not accept posts, bribes, or other inducements that may cause a conflict of interest in connection with their journalistic activity and that may compromise their credibility." – The Code of Ethics for the Estonian Press.^[5]

"Journalists shall not have the right to accept gifts, paid trips, to go on vacations paid for by somebody else or accept any other benefits that might affect their independence." – Code of Ethics of Lithuanian Journalists and Publishers.^[6]

PR companies, in their turn, have their own agendas. Part of a public relations professional's job is to win over journalists using various methods, including by organizing press tours or other events. In a selection of Romanian case studies,^[7] Liana Ganea and Alexandru Bradut Ulmanu state that, "When reporters forget about their professional principles and obligations, their cooperation with PR professionals can result in providing the audience with unfiltered data that might be partisan or false. Certain organizations (institutions or companies) or public persons who sometimes turn communication with journalists into real attempts to corrupt them should be responsible as well, although the main culprits are the journalists who allow this."

Fortunately, I have not heard about many cases of journalists' corporate corruption in Moldova lately except for the one that caused a great scandal in February 2018 when a PR company invited a group of journalists to Istanbul to visit the Medical Park Hospital that was allegedly deceiving patients. Even some reputable journalists have thus failed this test.

[4] http://ethicnet.uta.fi/germany/german_press_code

[5] http://ethicnet.uta.fi/estonia/the_code_of_ethics_for_the_estonian_press

[6] http://ethicnet.uta.fi/lithuania/code_of_ethics_of_lithuanian_journalists_and_publishers

[7] http://www.cji.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/9_-PR-si-jurnalism_-Unde-trasam-granita.pdf

Because they are used to the press in developed countries, some authors expressly state in their PR manuals that excess can make journalists suspicious and thus turn the tables on the company. “Refreshments should be laid on, but you should not be too lavish as reporters can be suspicious that they are being softened up with an expensive buffet,” says Jim Blythe in the collection 100 Great PR Ideas from Leading Companies Around the World.

Unfortunately, neither the luxury hotel, the paid trip nor the gifts put the Moldovan journalists who went to Turkey on alert. On the contrary, the majority of them tried to justify themselves in various ways that in the end made

them even less credible. As a result, both the hospital that got a poor reputation for buying journalists and the editorial offices that gave in to the temptation to see Istanbul for free without thinking that this could affect their independence and credibility were losers. The weakness of the few independent journalists was evident, and the guild was left with yet another illustration of professional sin. Instead of going forward and building credibility little by little, we are still at the stage of accepting favors from those we in fact should be treating in a critical and unbiased manner.

Viorica ZAHARIA



Students of Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism on a study visit at PRO TV in Bucharest. Unforgettable feelings of excitement next to Mihai Dedu and other celebrities of the TV station. The study visit is part of the learning program at CSAJ as it takes place for the third year in a row with the aim of familiarizing students with the inner workings of media in a EU member state.

The Campaign's Audiovisual Degeneration

Those without a TV Station Should Buy One

We have somehow become used to the fact that each Moldovan TV station “belongs to someone” and that this “someone” is in most cases politically affiliated. In other words, our TV broadcasters are actually branches of political parties; this weighs heavily on the choice of topics and how they are covered. We can see it in the presence of a filming crew at each charity event of the boss (or boss's wife) and in the coverage of each event (concert/saint's day/field visit/inauguration/launch...) with the participation of the party leader or one of the affiliated MPs, ministers or local councilors, not to mention the intense promotion of any initiatives or accomplishments of the party. In Moldovan television and radio broadcasting, the notions of “neutrality,” “objectivity” and “impartiality” are on the verge of extinction and will soon be on the list of endangered press species.

During election campaigns the situation is even worse: TV stations become more radical and turn propaganda and brainwashing tools into weapons against other candidates. It does not take a media expert to see how dirty and deplorable some of the coverage was during the very recent campaign for local elections in Chisinau and Balti.

The behavior of NTV Moldova and Exclusiv TV that re-broadcast the Russian stations NTV and TNT as well as that of Accent TV (controlled by the Party of Socialists) was somewhat predictable: Let us praise our candidate Ceban and criticize all others during the first round, and praise Ceban and criticize Nastase during the second. Jurnal TV behaved in a similar fashion favoring Andrei Nastase versus the other candidates.

Choral Pluralism

The behavior of the largest Moldovan TV conglomerate (GMG Holding) that brings four national broadcasters (and two small ones) together under the same roof and the same command post is worthy of becoming a true case study. Although officially the Democratic Party (PD) did not nominate its own candidates either for mayor of the capital or of Balti (a strange strategy for a ruling party, isn't it?), for several months the TV stations owned by the PD head were dedicating almost all of their air time to the promotion of “independent” candidate Silvia Radu. Here is Silvia Radu as a supermom on a TV show, there she is

in another show on a twin channel talking about her vast managerial experience, and here is yet another broadcaster inviting Silvia Radu on a morning show. The newscasts of ALL the stations with numbers in their names as well as that with a “k” started with two or three (sometimes even LIVE) stories about the interim mayor's deeds and ended with seemingly apolitical ones such as an equestrian competition, a concert, or an exhibition inevitably with Radu's presence. Even after this former Fenosa head had to resign her position of interim mayor during the campaign and transferred the interim appointment to Ruslan Codreanu, the court broadcasters were still finding or inventing reasons to create daily news items starring the “independent” candidate. Silvia Radu gave an interview from a tractor cab; Silvia Radu posted some photos of her cooking breakfast for her family on Facebook; a street light was installed at an intersection thanks to Silvia Radu's month-old order when she still was the interim mayor; some artists were painting a national mural on a wall and guess what: Silvia Radu was passing by and applied a few brush strokes. At the same time the holding's broadcasters generally ignored the campaign activities of the other candidates with one exception: Andrei Nastase. While Silvia Radu (miraculously and inexplicably) merited praise, none of the four GMG TV channels spoke positively or neutrally even once about the common candidate of PPDA, PAS and PLDM. The name Nastase was invariably accompanied by such descriptions as “the godson of fugitive criminal Victor Topa” and by information that over the past two years he allegedly had not declared any income and had been living off the money of his wife and allowances from his children who live in Germany. When fighting against their boss's enemy, the employees (I cannot call them “journalists”) on multiple occasions violated the norms of professional ethics, morality and common sense. They created news stories that made Nastase look bad using the candidate's telephone conversation with his mother, and yet again images from last year's rallies in which the pants of the PPDA head were wet from sweat.

During the second round after Silvia Radu had disappeared from the list, GMG broadcasters started openly promoting Ion Ceban. Not one single newscast on a station controlled by the PD went without the news items that Ion Ceban had promised to resign from his party if he were elected mayor while Andrei Nastase, however, refused to say whether he planned to do the same illustrated

by the image of a young employee intensively shoving her microphone in Nastase's face. The so called public debates initiated by Ceban and Nastase's refusal to participate in them (as if it were okay for one candidate to determine the other candidate's schedule) were largely covered as well, or should we rather say commented on by the PD court broadcasters. Even the victory of Andrei Nastase was announced in traditional GMG style: one phrase about the results and the rest about the new mayor's income, houses, cars, and his mother.

At the Barricades

Jurnal TV which openly supported Nastase felt compelled to counterpunch, publishing in the midst of the campaign the report the Court of Accounts sent to ANRE about the severe financial problems registered at Gas Natural Fenosa when it was led by Silvia Radu as well as information about the monthly salary of over 400,000 MDL she had for many years, a sum unimaginable for the majority of Moldovan citizens. More than once the stories about the independent candidate broadcast by Jurnal TV were accompanied by vicious and even abusive comments showing her in a negative light. All of the broadcaster's shows—informative, analytical and even comedies—promoted this message. The other two warring parties seemed to discover the power of satire as well: Prior to the election both the Socialist and the Democratic holdings launched politically-flavored entertainment shows to deride their opponents. In addition, to extend their coverage and enhance their credibility, both sides launched newscasts on the Russian entertainment stations they controlled (meant to be apolitical): TNT and, respectively, STS.

In the Debate and Out of It

Following their own regulations, the TV stations that organized debates (PRO TV, TV 8 and Moldova 1) provided the candidates with equal airtime while newscasts daily covered the campaign events of all candidates. At the same time, some of the broadcasters that officially stated they would not cover the elections (e.g., TVC 21 and RTR Moldova) invited some of the candidates to their studios but ignored others thus violating the principle of proportional access to broadcasting. In other words, all candidates were *equal*, but some were *more equal* than others.

Polls vs Ballot Boxes

As the first round was getting closer, several public opinion polls were launched by various institutions. Every sin-

gle one of them, however, showed that just two candidates had a chance to reach the second round: Ion Ceban and Silvia Radu. TV stations from the GMG holding widely covered the publication of each poll including on talk shows with experts sharing their views on how natural and explicable the results were, how good a mayor Silvia Radu would be and how potential voters for Andrei Nastase should abandon any hopes of seeing their candidate in the second round. Ironically (or not), even though no one ever disagreed that PSRM candidate Ion Ceban had the best chance of making it to the second round and thus becoming Silvia Radu's rival (as the plot provided and promoted by GMG said), the trust almost never attacked the PSRM candidate. Since the Democrats and the Socialists had a common enemy in Balti as well, the PD court channels in tune with NTV Moldova broadcast lots of stories about the terrible situation in the city claiming that Balti citizens were sick and tired of the Renato Usatai team and even showed a news item on how the young wing of the PSRM had planted flowers in the northern capital's pot-holes. The experts had to swallow their predictions for a while after the election results were announced (Nicolae Grigorisin won with 62% in the first round in Balti and Andrei Nastase won in the second round in Chisinau) as they were unable to explain their pathetic miscalculations.

Perhaps and Maybe...

With each passing year and each election campaign, the contributions of Moldovan broadcasters leave an increasingly bitter after taste. Most moguls have invested millions in their media empires seeing them not only and not primarily as income producing businesses. Television in their hands has turned from a source of information into a tool for promoting their interests and a weapon for destroying competitors. The most relevant example is probably the news item about the 30,000 Syrians widely disseminated by those who supported Maia Sandu during the presidential election. They struck below the belt without any moral constraint.

The worst part is that in their battles, the political giants used those who were once known as journalists as shields. We must not always judge them by the nasty things they have to publish in return for the money their bosses are paying them. Alternatives are quite few in a monopolized market in which 80% of TV broadcasters are politically controlled: You either humbly accept the rules of the game and prostitute yourself to provide for your family using your professional knowledge and skills in someone else's

war or you look for a job in another field that does not demand any moral compromises. Of course you can get a job in a media outlet that has an editorial policy as close to your own beliefs and values as possible, although the independent ones among us barely survive due to the said monopolization. They cannot afford competing with the politically affiliated giants either in terms of investments or in salaries. Even if hundreds of employees of party stations resigned tomorrow, sick of the mud they have to roll around every day, the apolitical media outlets would not have the capacity to absorb them and offer them jobs and salaries half as big as they have now. It is a vicious circle. Breaking it will be difficult, painful and require sacrifice. So far, however, today's mercenaries who stain their names and reputations in exchange for certain benefits and sign

texts they are ashamed of are encouraged by the numerous examples of their predecessors who during their careers managed to change bosses more frequently than shoes and who remain in high demand against all odds.

We have come to a point when not a single person seen on a TV station deserves to be called a journalist. I do, however, know journalists who do their jobs differently and even those who chose to change professions not wanting to be part of the dirty games hiding behind the screen. This gives me hope that maybe someday the word "television" in the Republic of Moldova will not necessarily be synonymous with political partisanship, media lynching, lies, and manipulation.

Dorin SCOBIOALA

The Press Law: For It or Against It?

The freedom of the press, the free circulation of information and ideas with no intervention by public authorities plays a significant role in the development of a democratic, free and stable society. Given the major importance of media for the development of democracy, over several years the Council of Europe has been developing an extended set of standards to help national decision makers in member states regulate the media and implicitly, to guarantee the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Republic of Moldova confirmed its adherence to the principles of freedom of expression provided in several regional and international documents, including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. After gaining independence in 1989 and guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression in the constitution, in 1994 Parliament adopted the Press Law. In the immediate post-Soviet period, this regulatory act was extremely important in the process of de-monopolizing the press, establishing the organization of periodicals and press agencies (broadcasting was regulated by a separate law), enshrining the rights and obligations of journalists, and establishing accreditation conditions for foreign journalists in the Republic of Moldova.

The Press Law has, however, been criticized often and harshly. In the early 2000s, a group of local experts advocated for its immediate annulment. The main argument held that full-scale freedom of the press is possible only without such laws and that in many countries, including Romania, laws for the print press do not exist. In democratic countries as a rule, only audiovisual media is regulated by special laws. For all other types of press, general legal provisions are sufficient: Basic rights and obligations are stipulated in the constitution, and economic aspects are contained in civil codes and other laws that apply equally to all economic agents^[1]. In fact, the controversial attempt to adopt a press law in Hungary caused waves of protests throughout the entire bloc.

Multiple provisions are obsolete and inadequate

The general regulations on defamation in the Press Law are too formal and discretionary. As a result, by 2010 the European Court of Human Rights had found more than ten cases of violations by national authorities of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Following these judgements against the Republic of Moldova and in order to significantly reduce the possibility of violations in cases of defamation and protecting private life, in 2010 Parliament adopted the Law on Freedom of Expression.

This law contains provisions that (i) broaden the right to freedom of expression (content and principles of freedom of expression according to Council of Europe standards), (ii) list specific aspects of freedom of expression in media, (iii) prevent censorship in the media, (iv) protect the right to criticize the state and public authorities, (v) presume innocence in relation to freedom of expression, and (vi) protect information sources. On the other hand, it provides specific procedures that must be followed in examining cases of defamation and in protecting privacy and family life. With the adoption of this organic law, certain provisions of the Press Law have become obsolete. Maintaining the Press Law to regulate the rights and obligations of journalists is not justified because guarantees for exercising the freedom of expression for media and for journalists are expressly provided for in the Law on Freedom of Expression and in the Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Other provisions in the Press Law are included in other regulatory acts for mass media that have been adopted by subsequent parliaments and adapted to international standards. Although the provisions of the Press Law on the accreditation of journalists, including foreign ones, are vague and allow authorities to adopt their own regulations, we still believe that accreditation should be regulated by law. If the Press Law is repealed, such provisions could be included in the Law on Access to Information. The provisions obliging editorial offices of newspapers to keep material can be included in Law on the Archive Fund of the Republic of Moldova while those obliging periodicals to publish reference data can be transposed into the Law on Freedom of Expression.

[1] Olivia Pirtac 'Repealing the Press Law: Advantages and Dangers', 'Mass Media in Moldova' Magazine, June 2012, p. 5

Regulations on the registration of periodicals and press agencies

Article 2 of the Press Law stipulates that the editorial offices of periodicals and press agencies are legal entities that carry out their activities in accordance with the law in force and with their charters. In the current version of Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova (adopted eight years after the Press Law came into force), press agencies and periodicals are not listed among the legal entities that can form corporations. Such organizational and legal forms are no longer justified in the context of existing regulations and practices for establishing media institutions. From an economic point of view, the viability of a press entity is ensured by the advertising space it sells via contracts with distributors. Therefore, most media outlets choose to become private legal entities in one of the forms provided for in the law (most often they are registered as limited liability companies), and they register under the Law on State Registration of Legal Entities and Individual Entrepreneurs and Articles 55–67 of the Civil Code. The object or type of media activity in such cases is indicated as “activities of news organizations,” according to the *Classifier of Economic Activities in Moldova*. We believe that the classifier should add “activities of news agencies and periodicals” to the list considering that the Law on Denationalization of Public Periodicals defines periodicals as, “...newspaper, magazine, almanac, bulletin or another publication with a permanent name that is issued two or more times a year.”

The regulations on the registration of periodicals and press agencies are excessive and restrictive and do not comply with the rules in the Civil Code on the registration and establishment of legal entities. Thus, the arguments for the Ministry of Justice to continue to keep the Registry of Periodicals are justified only for properly registered publications which constitute a minority. It is inopportune to create a separate legal entity specifically for the press as Article 2 of the Press Law absurdly states.

Moreover, the provisions in the Press Law that a foreigner can hold only up to 49% of the statutory capital of a periodical and may never be its editor-in-chief are extremely restrictive and discriminatory and contradict Article 6 of the Law on Investments in Entrepreneurial Activity that guarantees that investors cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of citizenship, place of residence, place of registration or business activity, country of origin of investor or investment, or for any other reason. Investors shall be granted fair and equal conditions which exclude the

application of discriminatory measures that could hinder the management, operation, maintenance, use, exploitation, acquisition, expansion or disposition of investments.

Regulation or self-regulation of press activity?

Paragraph 1 of Resolution 1003 (1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on ethics in journalism^[2] states: “In addition to the legal rights and obligations set forth in the relevant legal norms, the media have an ethical responsibility towards citizens and society which must be underlined at the present time, when information and communication play such an important role in the formation of citizens’ personal attitudes and the development of society and democratic life.” The resolution further lists binding principles for media and provides for setting up self-regulatory mechanisms comprising media professionals to oversee the implementation of ethical norms and to develop resolutions on the observance of ethical precepts.

The national institution for self-regulation for media outlets in the Republic of Moldova is the Press Council founded on 1 October 2009 by six associations working in the media. The council examines complaints related to journalists’ editorial activities aiming to increase media institutions’ accountability to media consumers by promoting the observance of professional standards and journalism ethics.

Media legislation in the Republic of Moldova is continuously improving. Despite the fact that there are a number of rules that have not been harmonized with European standards, this is not a decisive factor in undermining press freedom. Existing acts contain sufficient regulations (Law on Freedom of Expression, Broadcasting Code, anti-discrimination laws, etc.) to punish the press for disseminating defamatory information or for violating private life. Therefore, the full-scale freedom of the press will exist only when the legal regulations on its activity and on journalists disappear and self-regulation is strengthened in its own right.

Tatiana PUIU

[2] [http://consiliuldepresa.md/upload/Rezolutia_1003__\(1993\)__a_APCE_cu_privire_la_etica_jurnalistica.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/upload/Rezolutia_1003__(1993)__a_APCE_cu_privire_la_etica_jurnalistica.pdf)

Gagauziya Radio Televizionu Under Political Siege Again

According to the Broadcasting Code adopted in 2006, Gagauziya Radio Televizionu (GRT) has the status of a regional public broadcaster, i.e., it is funded by the public, serves the public and is controlled by the public. Yet in reality, GRT is funded from the state budget, desperately tries to serve the public, but is politically controlled. Politicians, regardless of their color, age or residence (Comrat or Chisinau), obsessed with their pathological desire to control public broadcasters, are implementing the same primitive scenario: changing management. The difference is that the politicians in Comrat are lagging about ten years behind those in Chisinau.

Legislative Brushwood: National Experience

In 1995, Parliament adopted the Broadcasting Law with two provisions on public broadcasting: Article 1 defined a public broadcasting institution, and Article 7 provided that State Company Teleradio-Moldova was a public broadcasting institution. This confusing nomenclature (a state and at the same time a public institution) and the lack of a clear legal basis for establishing such a broadcasting institution canceled the influence of the law in enforcing the idea and the practice of public broadcasting in the country.^[1]

Between 1997 and 2001, Parliament adopted one decision and six laws^[2] amending, supplementing or interpreting the Broadcasting Law. Basically, those documents pursued a single goal: absolute control over public broadcasting. Looking back, we can see that the amendments were implemented whenever the public broadcaster or the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) tried to get out from under political control.

The first amendments actually justified the interference of the legislative branch in the activities of Teleradio-Moldova. As a result, for several years managers' resignations came off a conveyor belt at the company. None of them succeeded in fulfilling their terms of office till the end.

[1] https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/22.Institutionalizarea%20si%20evolutia%20audiovizualului%20in%20RM.pdf

[2] <http://www.e-democracy.md/files/studiu-mass-media.pdf>

When the situation became critical, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, following wide-ranging debates, adopted Resolution 1280 (2002) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Moldova. Article 10(10) of the resolution stipulated the revision of the Broadcasting Law and the amendment of the status of Teleradio Moldova to make it a public broadcasting institution.

To implement the resolution, two draft laws on the public broadcasting institution were submitted to Parliament. The first one was submitted by the parliamentary opposition and civil society, and the second one came from the president of the country. Both draft laws were reviewed by the Council of Europe. The first got 9 points out of 10 while the draft submitted by the head of state got 1 point. In July 2002, Parliament adopted the draft law submitted by the head of state.

Attempts to implement the new law have failed. Meanwhile, after a number of amendments, the Broadcasting Law has become obsolete as well. Thus in 2006, Parliament managed to adopt the Broadcasting Code that is still in force now.

In 2008, an independent review pointed to major loopholes in this code. Attempts made during the next five years to address them delivered no tangible results. Hence, Parliament has become aware of the need to adopt a new law; one was developed in 2011. In 2016, it was reviewed and submitted for examination. After that, it was voted on in first reading and withdrawn. After five years, that new law has become an old law. In 2017, Chisinau developed a new draft law regulating this realm that was eventually voted on in the first reading in April 2018. What's next? Time will show us.

Legislative Brushwood: Regional Experience

In July 2007, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia (PAG) adopted the *Law on Television and Radio building mainly on the Broadcasting Code*. In November 2014, the PAG made amendments and addenda to the 2007 law taking the duties for licensing, supervision and control from central public authorities and transferring them to regional authorities. Chisinau was on alert. The BCC notified the

central authorities, and the Comrat Territorial Office of the State Chancellery filed for a repeal of the law with the Comrat Court. In 2015, the Comrat Court rejected the appeal, and the Comrat Court of Appeals upheld the judgement of the trial court.

In March 2016, the PAG adopted a new Broadcasting Law. Before its adoption, the draft law had been severely criticized by both the central authorities and civil society. The BCC, for instance, notified the Presidency, Parliament, the government, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Security and Intelligence Service that the draft law aimed to:

- rescind the right of the BCC to issue broadcasting and rebroadcasting licenses;
- establish a procedure to appoint the GRT Council of Observers (CO) other than the one indicated in the Broadcasting Code;
- empower the PAG to monitor and control broadcasters' and service providers' compliance with the ATU Gagauzia Broadcasting Law;
- establish control over GRT activity.

In a commentary on the law, the Electronic Press Association (APEL) pointed out the following loopholes:

- Most of the provisions of the law are declarative which makes them either non-functional or interpretable.
- More than half of the more than 400 provisions target the GRT although the law has a different name.
- At least 32 (70%) of the 46 articles require amendments/adjustments in order for the law, once implemented, to achieve its stated purpose;
- The law contains extremely restrictive provisions that can generate abuse.
- The law provides the GRT CO with unlimited powers that it could use to bludgeon GRT's management, editorial policy, and employees. For instance, according to the law, the GRT head has nothing to do with the editorial policy of the station.

With the aid of subject-matter experts, in the summer of 2017 a group of PAG members developed a special draft law aimed at removing political influence on GRT. If the draft had become law, it would have greatly contributed to GRT's economic and editorial independence. For example, the draft law provided for a budget of 2.5% of the

total amount of Gagauz regional income which meant that the financing of the broadcaster wouldn't depend on the degree of loyalty to the authorities.

The local Parliament voted on the draft law in two readings, but the Bashkan (governor) of Gagauzia refused to sign the law, invoking irregularities including a violation of procedures. Subsequently, the draft law was withdrawn. To date, the law adopted in 2016 is in force in the ATU.

Since we made a parallel between Chisinau and Comrat from a legislative point of view, note that the story, with the excessive involvement of politicians in the activity of the public broadcaster, is like a carbon copy.

Lessons That Work in Chisinau but are Useless in Comrat

The reorganization of the GRT into a regional public broadcasting institution (RPBI) was initiated in the second half of 2007. Monitoring the reorganization, media and human rights associations found that, "It was conducted in a non-transparent manner, with violations of the Broadcasting Code and of the relevant local law and that it lacked cooperation with civil society." They also questioned the objectivity of the criteria for selecting candidates for the CO of the RPBI and further noted that, "The BCC failed to respond to derogations from the legislation during the reorganization... and failed to undertake measures to protect the public interest and the rights of professionals in the field."^[3]

Ten years later we have the same situation: The GRT is basically under the same political siege. The legislative changes have fueled multiple resignations among managers in recent years that were accompanied by public scandals, political decisions, and no public involvement. The current political siege, which for sure won't be the last, began at the end of last year as a direct consequence of the law passed in the spring of 2016 and especially of the PAG election results in late 2016. Because the law allowed it, at the end of 2017 the PAG dismissed GRT's CO *in corpore*, basing its decision on the irregularities ATU's Court of Accounts had found.^[4] In this case it's not quite clear why a CO that doesn't have a say in supervising GRT affairs was appointed and why the PAG, as a "monitoring and control body" had failed to monitor the GRT and to intervene in due time. Some independent sources from Comrat believe

[3] www.apel.md.

[4] Gagauzmedia.md

that the truth was the fact that 8 out of 9 members of the CO were controlled by the Bashkan.^[5]

At the end of March 2018, the PAG elected a new CO^[6] after the former council challenged the PAG decision on the ground that it was illegal. The next month, GRT employees went on strike decrying the actions of the authorities as an attack against RPBI.^[7] The authorities persevered and on 26 April, the CO appointed a new acting director of the institution. It was the fourth attempt to do this after the editor-in-chief of the television station, the editor-in-chief of the radio station and the chief engineer had refused to take this post.^[8] On 7 May, the Comrat trial court rejected a request to cancel the PAG decision dismissing the GRT CO at the end of 2017.^[9] The court has yet to deliver a final judgement.

Tempers began to flare again in May. The local press wrote that the acting director, appointed by the new CO, had no higher education as required by law.^[10] The acting director failed to confirm or deny the allegations. With explanations, however, came the new chairman of the CO, the Dean of the Faculty of Law of Comrat University, arguing that he had seen the file the candidate for interim director had submitted; that the higher education diploma was missing (?) from the file; that the candidate was going to defend his bachelor thesis at Transnistrian State University on 12 June; that he was to obtain a bachelor's degree very soon; and that he had a "certificate" to this effect.^[11]

In a public statement, the author of the current Broadcasting Law of the ATU who thought he had developed a functional law declared that the new members of the CO were impostors and that the appointment of a person without higher education at the helm of GRT was impossible, according to the law. Both the lawmaker and the chairman of the CO are jurists, but they have different interpretations of Article 38 (the candidate must have higher education), which leaves no room for interpretation. This situation discredits both the work of the new CO and

that of the new acting director. It's a mockery of an explicit provision of the law.

Let's also take into consideration the following: On 25 May, the CO dismissed the GRT director and repeatedly appointed (?), *in camera*, the same acting director until the GRT chairman was to be appointed on a competitive basis (the competition was announced to take place in July).^[12] On 22 May (when the GRT director was still in office), the new acting director and a number of CO and GRT representatives had a meeting with BCC members. According to a press release, the parties discussed a number of sensitive topics including: (i) the overly powerful prerogatives of the CO (?); (ii) the lack of Romanian-speaking journalists; (iii) the need for methodological support from the BCC to align the broadcasting law in Gagauzia with both international and national standards; (iv) the refusal of service providers in the ATU to include the GRT in their offers; and (v) broadcasting GRT programs through National Multiplex A, among others.^[13] A few days after the meeting, a member of the PAG said that the alignment of the broadcasting law with national law was not possible at that time.^[14]

If we get the results of the meeting, we'll look into them; however, the event itself raises many concerns: Why aren't such meetings conducted on a regular basis?; Why do the COs of GRT and Teleradio Moldova fail to meet on a regular basis?; Why do the managements of both companies fail to meet on a regular basis? Hence, our take is that it'd be much easier to establish two radio and TV stations that would be truly public both for the benefit of the entities and for the benefit of the public.

Merciless Consequences

The political battles for the national public broadcaster have weakened in recent years while the battles to subdue the regional public broadcaster, on the other hand, are becoming stronger. It's regrettable! While the two fight, three lose—the politicians, the GRT and most of all, the citizens of ATU.

Ion BUNDUCHI

[5] <http://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/za-tele-za-zhivoe-pochemu-v-gagauzii-razgorelsya-skandal-vokrug-obshchestvennoy-te-36934>

[6] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=39564>

[7] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=39786>

[8] <http://media-azi.md/en/stiri/grt-council-observers-appointed-new-acting-director>

[9] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=40310>

[10] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=40603>

[11] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=40662>

[12] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=40723>

[13] <http://cca.md/news/membrii-cca-au-avut-o-ntrevedere-cu-reprezentan-i-ai-consiliului-de-observatori-i-ai-companiei->

[14] <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=40726>

Sincerity Crisis.

A Thousand Euros and a Suitcase

I have been saving a thousand euros for nine years. I have been living in uncertainty for nine years, day by day, scornfully writing about the “stability” proclaimed by the government. The more pronounced the governors’ “stability,” the more stressful my (our) instability. But I won’t touch those thousand euros. I will clench my teeth, eat only porridge, give up holidays, but I won’t touch those thousand euros. I am determined to resist... To resist as a journalist who lives from what he writes. Not endlessly, but as long as possible. When I can’t bear it anymore, I’ll take out those thousand euros, give them to the family, and leave. I will join the million Moldovans who send money to those left at home. Later, if things don’t change, we can sell the house and the whole family can leave.

Over the past days, I have found that many journalists have already done so. Too many of them—unbelievably many—people whom I studied with, whom I made a team with or competed with, journalists popular for their professionalism including media managers who once established respectable media outlets. I knew that the brain-drain phenomenon had affected our guild as well, but I appreciated its scale only in March. I asked my friends to comment on a Facebook post by listing the names of journalists they knew had left Moldova in recent years. The list terrified me. I personally knew most of them, having worked alongside some of them in different editorial offices. Moldova has lost some very good journalists in recent years. If all of them were to suddenly come back, an earthquake with a magnitude of 10 would occur in our media field. The pseudo-journalists would be unemployed and would be censured, the institutions they work for would be boycotted, and the 30,000 Syrians would have no chance of winning any elections in Moldova. But they will not return. On the contrary, I know another 13 good journalists who are now packing, selling their modest possessions and asking those already settled abroad to find some work for them... Another 20 journalists are considering the possibility of leaving. They have scoped it out. They have become a minority here. The majority have chosen “welfare” and the role of politicians’ lackeys.

Those who have packed their suitcases are journalists who live modestly, those not working at the holding. They were hoping that their professionalism would be appreciated at

some point. They resisted temptation and remained faithful to their profession’s principles. They were convinced that the time would come when the values they had sacrificed for would count. They were hoping that this country would need them “clean” and would reward them for persevering with opportunities to keep them close to their families. But some of them have grown hoary while waiting. They leave. They start from scratch in other countries, change profiles and write only on social media or at best, on a blog. But they are a remote force—an untapped force. In the first years after leaving, they continue to follow carefully what is happening at home and they see other civilizations and countries succeeding where Moldova fails. They could write about the two worlds in which they lived and live, thus changing perceptions and mentalities here at home. There is a naturally created network of Moldovan journalists around the world that we do not explore in any way. Of the hundreds of journalists who have left, only about five have attempted to remain visible in virtual space on their own. This force can be focused, for instance, into a large, multimedia project: *mobile journalism*. Some of them may be good editorialists, camera operators, photo-reporters. The EU invests huge amounts in projects meant to make visible the advantages of Moldova’s rapprochement with the union, but the hundreds of Moldovan journalists escaping to the EU who directly contribute of these advantages and could have a comparative approach do not write a line about them.

A respectable radio station in Romania has made the effort to bring home journalists from abroad. Not many: twelve of them. Their return has shaken the competition. The experience has had its say. In addition, over the past five years the country has raised a team of young professional journalists. They have grasped quality journalism, understood that ethics in journalism is a lesson not to be missed, formed their backbone with the support of their seniors, and together have made Romania more informed.

The massive departure of the best in the profession has left Moldovan journalism without a skeleton. Many journalism graduates are unprepared when employed in editorial offices. They perform tasks like robots and have one goal: to get “on screen.” And they get there because filters and role-models are missing. Their role-models are gone.

Their places in some offices have been occupied by superficial chiefs (coordinators), usually politically subordinated. This negatively influences their professionalism from the start. Consequently, we do not have a more informed Moldova but rather a more manipulated Moldova; the effects of such a “journalism school” will have an impact in the long run.

After the March Facebook posting, some of my colleagues who were thinking I wanted to leave asked me to tell them if I found a “good opportunity” outside the country, and others who had left already wanted to help me with rent and a job “in the orchard.” A former female journalist asked me if I was married...

My suitcase, like those of my colleagues, stays open in the closet. Currently, it's almost empty. The thousand euros are in their place. I'm trying to resist so I can stay longer with my family. But the feeling that everything is temporary burdens me. I look at the photo on my ID and understand why I can't work nights as before. Still, I'm making an effort, sleeping in shifts, and trying to look as vigorous as a twenty-five year old. Three hours of sleep were enough for me at that time.

In times of plague I have always been saved by my small projects—many but with little compensation. When one fails, the budget shortfall is not very large. Besides, this maintains my independence. When I'm pressured, I withdraw and hardly feel financially related to that job. But this will not work endlessly. Journalists are people. They also need two pairs of shoes, and they suffer when a mischievous blogger scornfully notices that they appear on TV dressed in the same jackets for 10 years. They despair when their dress shoes wear out after 9 years... Journalists are also afraid of old age, especially in a state so uncertain. They can't live all their lives at the limits. Some of them will refuse the bribe bag delivered specially to their doors once, twice, or even three times in favor of the “dry bagel on the table” (financial shortages). At some point, however, they will either accept the bribe or take the thousand euros they have saved, quietly pack the suitcase during the night, and leave without waking up their loved ones. They are sensitive and goodbyes hurt.

P.S.: This is “fiction.” In “reality,” partisan bloggers have written that I am “bourgeois” with a house worth millions, that Rosca “gave” me an apartment, that Filat awarded me a stipend, and that my children are studying at private high schools. I feel that I want to close the suitcase.

Vitalie CALUGAREANU

What Does Facebook's New Algorithm and its Scandal with Cambridge Analytica Mean for Journalists?

In the digital era, topics such as social media and virtual identity are widely discussed in various professional environments. The Facebook *versus* Cambridge Analytica scandal set the stage for bringing back to the forefront both issues about creating and building a virtual identity and the ethical aspects of protecting personal data and information sharing techniques.

According to BBC reports, Facebook announced that the data of 87 million users was improperly shared with the political consulting group Cambridge Analytica. Facebook was harshly criticized when it came to light that it had known since 2015 about the collection of the data for research purposes but had relied on the London firm's assurance that it had deleted the information. The Cambridge Analytica scandal has proved that until now, personal data security had not been a priority for Facebook and that the actions of certain non-state entities could lead to major social, political and economic changes globally at minimal cost.

Christopher Wylie, one of the main whistleblowers in this case, estimated that Cambridge Analytica had used the data of 50 million persons during Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign.^[1] During hearings at the United States Senate, Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's co-founder, acknowledged that he may have given the personal messages of some users to Cambridge Analytica without their permission and highlighted that he was one of the 87 million affected users. The information was obtained through software developed by the American psychologist born in Moldova Alexander Kogan.

Following the hearings, Mark Zuckerberg said in front of the House of Representatives that he was committed to correcting the mistakes that had affected Facebook users, highlighting that he had not taken sufficient measures to avoid the tools being used for petty, negative and manipulative purposes. The Facebook founder referred to the dissemination of false news, the intrusion into the election,

hate speech, and the use of personal data. Ensuring virtual interaction between people is not sufficient. It's important that this interaction is positive so that users are sure they are using a safe platform, not a platform oriented to attacks and the dissemination of false news. During the hearings, Zuckerberg said that a long period of time would be needed to solve these problems and to completely eliminate other shortcomings.^[2]

Following the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook stock experienced significant financial fluctuations dropping in value by around 6.8% in March and April 2018 which resulted in losses of tens of billions of dollars for shareholders; however, the company succeeded in managing its image crisis. Zuckerberg's Congressional hearing revealed not only the data breaches allowed by the social network but also the poor understanding among US senators of how Facebook works which allowed the company to recover financially in early May.

Facebook's immediate actions to address the issue include a number of extensive control operations over its apps; over 200 were cancelled at the end of the first stage of the internal review. Pending subsequent investigations, many persons have been blocked or excluded from the network due to their inappropriate use of information.

Ime Archibong, Vice President of Facebook's Partnership Division that deals with relationships with other companies, said there was a lot to do to achieve a relevant and visible result, but it would require time and precise working strategies both to recover Facebook's image in users' eyes and its revenues.^[3]

In early May, Cambridge Analytica announced that it would initiate insolvency proceedings and withdraw from

[1] Cambridge Analytica files spell out election tactics. <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-43581892> (accessed on 14.05.2018)

[2] Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's FULL testimony to U.S. congress members. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCQ_ZGxE2U4 (accessed on 17.05.2018)

[3] Facebook sospende oltre 200 app dopo lo scandalo Cambridge Analytica. <https://tg24.sky.it/tecnologia/2018/05/14/facebook-app-sospese.html> (accessed on 17.05.2018)

the UK and US, but there are already some indications in the international press that it will resume its work under the name Emerdata Limited using the same headquarters and managers as Cambridge Analytica. The company will be structured as an organization dealing with data processing and other related activities.

Facebook's due diligence measures—developed long before this scandal—also include several actions that directly target media institutions and their relationship with social networks. Their importance increases still further if we take into account that this platform has quickly become a reliable media ally, offering itself as a system with a strong influence on audiences in addition to ways to disseminate information. Thus, changes in the operating algorithms (some seen as advantageous and others as disadvantageous) have taken place. Regarding media, they refer to the following:

- Set the order of postings on users' profiles (walls) by geographic location.
- Rate the popularity of a local news item by the number of users who click it.
- Prioritize personal posts at the expense of news which should account for only 4% of users' feeds.^[4]

Following these changes, publishers can use several strategies to overcome the loss of traffic. James Breiner, a teacher at Monterrey Institute in Mexico, has introduced a number of tactics that can help media institutions:

- Start an email newsletter with links to your content.
- Focus on the quality of users instead of the quantity: relationship rather than scale, engagement rather than volume.
- Identify your loyal users and tailor special offers and services to them.
- Focus most of your editorial resources on content that differentiates you from competitors.
- Credibility is the most important asset of the publication: Focus on native advertising or "sponsored content" rather than targeted advertising.
- Take advantage of what Facebook doesn't know about your users and their friends.

[4] Facebook changes the way local news and publications will be displayed. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/facebook-schimb%C4%83-modul%C3%AEn-care-vor-fi-afi%C8%99ate-%C5%9Ftirile-%C5%9Fi-publica%C5%A3iile-locale> (accessed on 17.05.2018)

- Talk about ethical values and public service with potential sponsors and contributors.
- Monetize the social capital you create.^[5]

In addition, an analysis^[6] of media results conducted in May shows that good faith institutions have not suffered and that they have managed, after a period of adjustment, to keep and in some cases even to increase their online audiences on the network.

Changes go further by strengthening ways of securing accounts on mobile phones. This involves two-factor authentication which doesn't depend only on the user's phone number but can also be done with codes generated by the authentication apps.

In conclusion, we can say that some of the actions Facebook has taken following the scandal it was involved in have, on the one hand, favored information products promoted and distributed by the media in terms of quality and credibility, but on the other hand, they have disadvantaged them in terms of distribution scale and quantitative increases in audiences and online traffic.

The digital era offers unlimited information opportunities. Digitization in media, also known as mediamorphosis, builds on a number of key principles such as (i) coevolution and coexistence (traditional means of sharing information evolve and coexist with new media), (ii) metamorphosis (changing and offering new features that guarantee their operation), (iii) propagation (emerging media propagate the dominant traits of earlier media), (iv) survival (traditional media are forced to adapt and evolve alongside modern media), and (v) opportunities for the public and users according to emerging needs.^[7]

The pluriformity of virtual connections among media institutions' websites and social networks opens up a great number of opportunities for audiences to be active consumers who can express opinions and who can act directly when necessary.

[5] Following Facebook's changes, publishers can use these strategies to overcome the loss of traffic. <http://media-azi.md/en/stiri/following-facebooks-changes-publishers-can-use-these-strategies-overcome-loss-traffic> (accessed on 17.05.2018)

[6] <https://theoutline.com/post/4494/facebooks-fake-news-algorithm-seems-to-be-working?zd=3&zi=rppi5wz5&zi=fe2xsvz6>

[7] Condurache Daniel. Information Digitization. <http://documents.tips/documents/curs-digitalizarea-informatiei.html> (accessed on 20.05.2018)

Facebook will continue to use its strategies for protecting personal data and promoting quality information products to restore its image in users' and competitors' eyes. The fight against false news is proof of this. Hence, Facebook on the one hand is giving up certain functions ("Trending" being the most recent) and on the other hand is testing new ways to display news including a "Breaking News" tag and a "Today In" function in its local news feed.

Although the algorithms play either for or against those who opt for quality information or for a tabloid and the

links to material are not displayed as intensely as in the past, media institutions will not give up this platform since the greatest traffic on their websites is due to Facebook. The level of interaction is calculated by profile and page and by dividing the average number of "likes" and comments received in a certain period of time. Media are, in fact, largely dependent on social networks as reliable allies in ensuring visibility, audiences, and interactivity.

Mariana TACU

► *Students of Chisinau School of Advanced Journalism, enthusiastic about the Digital Journalism course, taught by journalist Dumitru Ciorici.*



Victor Spinu, co-author of TROLLESS: “The Internet helps us to evolve intellectually but can also ruin lives and destroy countries”

Victor Spinu graduated from the Faculty of Journalism of Chisinau State University in 2012 and after several years of work in the media realm chose to specialize in web design. When the Internet began to be used to spread false news, propaganda, etc., Victor took on an ambitious task: to find solutions for these problems. This is how TROLLESS—an app that tracks down trolls on Facebook—was born. It happened in 2015.

Media Azi: *Victor, what has the TROLLESS app managed to demonstrate up to now?*

Victor Spinu: Initially, we planned to raise awareness among Facebook users and to educate people not to be manipulated by trolls. As of now, our database counts 700 active users of the app and thousands of false profiles reported.

M. A.: *How do you infer that a troll is promoting the interests of a political party on Facebook?*

V. S.: According to the information we’ve gathered, which is based on observations and analyses, trolls are particularly active during election campaigns. The vast majority are party activists, and most represent the organization Democratic Youth. This is easy to deduce when compared with a real profile as with trolling you will find with 99% probability pictures of roses (the PD symbol) and the various party events these persons have taken part in. Other parties have trolls too, but the PDs’ are more active. We are currently creating a second version of the app which involves developing and transforming it into a platform. More specifically, we aim to post on our space the profile of every troll acting on Facebook. We’ll come up with solid evidence, i.e. troll’s name, the date when he/she joined Facebook, the picture he/she uses, the actual source of the picture; the pages he/she has liked; the pages where he/she commented, what and how he/she commented, etc.



Hence, on the basis of this evidence, users will decide for themselves whether or not the troll’s profile is trustworthy.

M. A.: *We should specify that this platform is being developed under the Media-M program implemented by Internews Moldova...*

V. S.: Exactly. We wanted to further develop the TROLLESS app so that we can continue what we started in 2015. Our aim is to document all the trolling profiles we have detected and their involvement in certain topics of public interest. This information will be subsequently sent to Facebook with a plea for them to take action to combat this phenomenon. We hope to be supported in this en-

deavor by non-government media organizations, by the press institutions in Moldova that are constantly attacked by trolls, and even by our colleagues in Ukraine, Georgia, and Russia where the phenomenon is widespread.

M. A.: *What would you say to the critics of TROLESS who suspect that you are restricting the freedom of expression of Internet users?*

V. S.: Our counter-argument is the following: When speaking about the freedom of expression, we are usually referring to a real, concrete person... As for trolls, they often act (attack) anonymously. It's your business if you want to create an anonymous or even a fake profile, but if you want to discuss certain topics, to get involved in the public or political life of a country using this false profile, you should have the guts to show who you are since freedom of expression means not only to share your opinion but also to respect the opinions of others, to behave in a civilized way. Trolls' activities are incompatible with ethics because they work from false profiles and steal identities.

M. A.: *What do you do with the false profiles you identify using TROLLESS?*

V. S.: One of the basic principles behind TROLLESS is that the user has to decide for himself/herself. We do not limit, delete, or hide the profiles we think are trolls. We just mark them in red, and give people a clue that they might be false. The user has to decide for himself/herself what to do with the information. We are aware that users have to get used to such apps somehow and that the simple fact of developing such apps doesn't mean that all users will automatically use them. That's why the first phase of the project was probably the hardest since we had to demonstrate how the app works, how accurate it is. Now, I think that the second phase will be much easier.

M. A.: *On the IJC Media-azi.md portal we also sometimes see comments that seem to be written by the same person: They focus on the same topic, they use almost the same phrases and expressions. Does it mean that trolls have visited us too?*

V. S.: It is possible! Comments that have a similar message and formulation are probably written by one person and then sent to trolls for dissemination, but the trolls can go much further. Recently, we discovered an unusual case when they created fake pages of some media institutions such as TV8, Jurnal TV and Ziarul de Garda. In other

words, they took over the identity of these pages, then accessed other websites and commented on certain public figures and on various sensitive topics. These comments were intended to represent the official position of those websites; in other words, the trolls attacked the credibility of these institutions. These pages are no longer active, but they may reappear around parliamentary elections when trolls' activities and the dubious techniques they use could intensify.

M. A.: *Since you have studied the troll phenomenon more closely, in your opinion, what makes people do such deplorable work?*

V. S.: Trolling is worthwhile for those who disregard morality. I think that the trolls in our country have salaries much higher than the average salary in the economy. After TV stations, troll factories are the second-largest and most efficient source of propaganda and manipulation. So those who make use of trolls' services have their reasons: What's the point of buying a TV station if you can create a team of 30-40 trolls and train them to work for you? You'd spend even less than if you bought a famous news portal that would cost, let's say, a million euros.

M. A.: *Some Facebook users have complained that they saw their names on the pages of certain politicians as if they were their sympathizers although they don't share their beliefs. Is that also trolls' work?*

V. S.: It's about Facebook's algorithms. It is possible that at some point those persons accessed that politician's page or watched his/her photos or videos, so Facebook thinks that you might be interested in this topic, takes over the information and spreads it further. Facebook uses a number of algorithms some of which are very complex, and although it tries to stop such mistakes, it sometimes admits gaps such as the opportunity to sell pages, profiles, and like.

M. A.: *Selling pages? Is that also possible?*

V.S.: There are a number of techniques through which one can become, unwillingly, the sympathizer of a politician. For instance, you access a page and you want to read something but you are told that the text is blocked and that you can unlock it only if you "like" that page. Hence, you agree to "like" it, and although you are told that your "like" is intended for only that page, it actually goes elsewhere, to the page of that politician, and thus you become his/her sympathizer.

Or, there is another technique. Some pages were initially created with names and certain thematic lines, but after a while they changed their names and their thematic lines while the “likes” they had received beforehand remained. We saw many such cases around the elections when overnight the “Children’s Toys” page became, let’s say, the “Party of Liberal Liberty” or a page with another name and an obvious political background. So, if you “liked” the “Children’s Toys” page, don’t be surprised that your “like” now appeared on the “Party of Liberal Liberty” page! It has become a trendy business nowadays. There are people who create pages, promote them up to a certain number of “likes,” and eventually sell them.

Much depends, however, on a page’s audience. If a page has ten thousand “likes” but by Indian, Maltese, Arabic or other audiences, it won’t cost too much. On the other hand, if it has tens of thousands of “likes” in Moldova, it can cost several hundred euros.

A recent technique allows you to combine multiple pages. Let’s say that you have created 10 pages and instead of managing each of them you combine them all in a single page. If every page had 1,000 “likes,” you now have a page with 10,000 “likes.”

M. A.: Who could buy them?

V. S.: The buyers are political parties and politicians, mainly those who emerge overnight. They need credibility, and they’re ready to pay for it. The same is true for some businesses. If the page has thousands of “likes” one would think that it is serious.

M. A.: Could you tell us more about fishing?

V. S.: Fishing is when you discover that your Facebook username is also used by other users. There are also true profiles when several real persons have the same name, but most of the time these are false profiles. This means that someone else has copied your name and photos and has seen who your friends are. With your identity, this person can send all kinds of false messages to all of the friends on your list; for example, “I need money because I’m going through some tough times, so please, put MDL 100 on my phone. I’ll pay you back next paycheck.” And because your friend knows you, he/she will transfer this money. Or, using your identity someone can send a virus-infected link. There is another situation: You open a link and suddenly your Facebook page appears as if you had logged out. You start wondering what could have happened, so you log in again thinking that it was an error or something. The truth is that the page you log into is false and, without meaning to, you have sent your username and password to the attackers.

M. A.: This Facebook is a whole labyrinth...

V. S.: The Internet is an interesting arena, full of things that are useful and necessary for the intellectual evolution of all of us. We need to know how to use it, otherwise the Internet can easily ruin lives and destroy countries. Facebook in particular and social networks in general have become uncontrollable, including because of trolls who confuse people with false news, mixing things together so much that one no longer believes anything.

Tatiana CORAI

Fake News: a Roadmap – a Book to Meditate on

The term fake news has so deeply invaded academic, ethical and daily discussions in journalism that it's becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle the phenomenon it designates and the endless excuses of some populist parties ("It's false! These are the allegations of the foes who wish us harm!"). At the same time, we are increasingly feeling the need to clarify as quickly and clearly as possible where this endless wave of unconfirmed rumors, gossip and legendary manipulation comes from. The spectrum of the topic is wide and varies widely from vaccines, seasonal viruses or a miracle solution for any type of cancer to children's education, emigration, sex scandals, extremism, foreign political game-playing and, of course, elections. The well-known format follows news canons' promising answers to the basic who? what? where? when? and (possibly) why? questions with perhaps a little manipulation here and there.

There is a publication—concise, specialized, and effective—that stands out among the array of solutions that have appeared on the battlefield of misinformation, propaganda and fake news. *Fake News: A Roadmap* (Riga, 2018) is the joint effort of a group of masters' degree students in Strategic Communications at King's College, London University and the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga, Latvia. Far from being just a product of compulsory research in college, this publication aims to effectively analyze the latest developments in the field with up-to-date data as of January 2018 while providing a normative, philosophical and operational framework to reasonably disentangle truth, lies, reality, trust, facts, and disinformation and their countless combinations in varying proportions.

The form of the book and the style chosen by the editors greatly facilitates the understanding of its content. Frankly speaking, this content is more robust than one would expect from a publication that has a total of 100 pages including final notes that thoroughly document each reference and an additional 27 pages of bibliography. The A5 format, the red cardboard cover, the drawings on the inside cover and at the beginning of each chapter, and the separate pages quoting "viral tweets" (suitable for hanging above one's desk, if desired) are enough to convince any-



one who wants to find out more about fake news but who is afraid of getting extremely bored while reading about it.

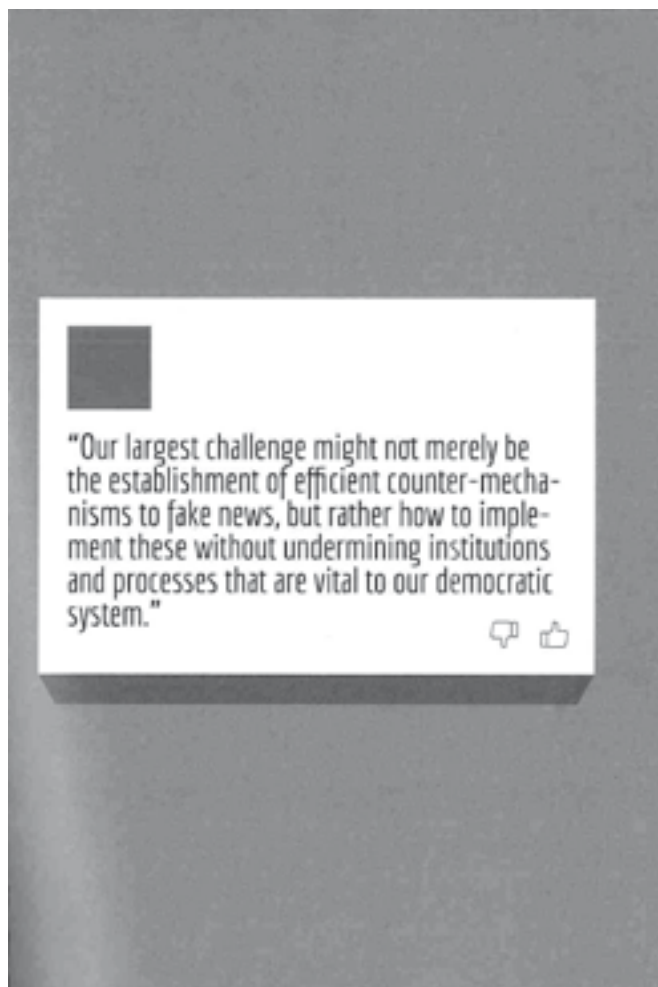
Its ambitious title denotes more than simple information. Since we are accustomed to getting only a part of what is announced, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the promised road map is present both in the book's format and content. Structurally, the book is divided into ten chapters called "routes" written by one or more researchers, each of which explores a specific aspect of the topic. *Fake News: A Roadmap* is edited by Jente Althuis and Leonie Haiden. They add remarks at the beginnings and the ends of the chapters thus linking them all to a common core.

“The term fake news has become the default catchphrase for truth-seekers wishing to label inaccurate reporting, truth-obscurers spreading malevolent assertions, or the unprepared who simply want to close down an uncomfortable discussion,” is the finding the editors express in the foreword along with their thanks which is also where they announce that the book is available free of charge to any reader in the world and invite them to explore the routes.

The routes form a sort of essay that could also fit neatly into a self-published book. They start by disentangling and defining one by one a number of key terms: populist politics (Route 1); post-truth and fake news (Route 2); truth, proof and evidence (Route 3); lies (Route 4) and trust (Routes 5 and 6).

The authors’ foray into history tells us, as we’ve suspected, that fake news is not new to the modern era and in fact was documented between the 1640s and 1650s when the English King Charles II issued “A Proclamation to Restrain the Spreading of False News, and Licentious Talking of Matters of State and Government.” The fact that the notion of “post-truth” is not new either is far less known. Although the term emerged during the 2016 American presidential election when the Oxford Dictionary made it their “word-of-the-year,” we find out that in 1830 physician John Abercrombie published a book that attempted to review how the mind perceives and understands truth.

As far as populism is concerned, which is perceived as a flaw in Moldovan politics mainly during the elections and against which some eager activists in the public sphere have been struggling for years, we discover a series of tools useful for understanding the phenomenon. Starting with



the features of populism synthesized by Isaiah Berlin half a century ago that are still valid, the route leads to its definition with its resemblance to propaganda which, in Nicholas O’Shaughnessy’s view, is the, “...antithesis of the objective search for and exposition of truth.”

The fifth route is of particular interest to journalists as it explores the changes that have occurred in recent decades in the media landscape due to new information technologies. Thus, information digitization and globalization are “to blame” for deleting the geographical and spatial boundaries that have naturally existed for centuries and have protected people from the turmoil of crises in other countries and regions and that currently make us vulnerable to natural disasters and cataclysms, accidents,

scandals, shocking news and poisonous information coming from all over the world.

And to add insult to injury (again, you’ll probably anticipate what follows), the echo of such news is multiplied hundredfold and thousandfold through the entities the authors call “power brokers” (Facebook, Google, and other giants in the same category). As a means of defense, each individual user tries to isolate himself/herself from the noise and the visual and digital pollution by selecting his/her information sources more carefully. But here comes trouble. There are side effects that Eli Pariser has characterized with names just as appealing as the previous ones: “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers.” These terms are suggestive enough for us to realize the effects they describe and that condition our mundane lives to online space. Did someone say “democratization of communication?...” the authors ask, and we subscribe.

So, what's the source of the problem? The key lies in action. It lies in whether or not we believe the news, whether or not we trust information sources, whether or not we check, accept or reject what we hear and read. Or, in other words, it lies in the choice people make when they turn on the remote control, when they click, post or share something. Occasionally (usually), this gesture just amplifies what they fear and avoid—a discourse polarizing society, breeding feelings of insecurity and pinpointing a power crisis among the less informed.

In this situation, the proverbial two-edged sword, the authors present us with trust. On the one hand, when we trust a politician, a party or a publication we abandon ourselves to, "...a willingness to be vulnerable and have positive expectations for the future" that implies a reduction in critical thinking. On the other hand, when we doubt any information in the press, a government statement or a fact that is accepted as such by a wide audience, we no longer trust political and democratic institutions. In turn, undermining trust compromises the very foundation of democracy and of the unbiased and objective press, respectively. The current information society builds (nevertheless) on their principles.

Should what we have learned not be applied in practice, any exploration of these seismic landscapes would be worthless. This is why the last three routes are dedicated to case studies of propaganda and manipulation used by three authoritarian regimes: ISIS/Daesh, North Korea and Russia. In the case of ISIS, the "secret" is that they always rephrase context and interpret fact from the point of view of religious doctrine (or vice versa), while North Korea still enjoys the "truth" of the parallel universe it has built on the basis on real historical facts and Russia is meanwhile content with simply discrediting all democratic values contrary to its own ideological discourse. In fact, it seems that the policy of confronting others has always been a feature specific to the governments of this country and continues to be a necessity including for Putin's regime.

So what are small buffer states that cannot detach themselves from their post-Soviet satellite condition to do? I will let you discover for yourself in the tenth route the measures to counter fake news and the conclusions of this journey. This route explains in detail when, how and why to respond to fake news with denial or not all.

Cristina MOGILDEA-LEVA

Memorandum on the Freedom of the Press in the Republic of Moldova

3 May 2017 – 3 May 2018

During 2017, media in the Republic of Moldova had been affected by the same problems as in the past: pluralism without diversity, concentration of media ownership, lack of ownership transparency, an insufficiently developed advertising market that seems to be captured, increasingly difficult access to information of public interest, political interference in the editorial activity of certain media outlets, public broadcasting distancing itself more and more from its public service function in favor of praising those in power, government-oriented regulators and legislative measures littered with attempts to control the media under the pretext of counteracting propaganda and child pornography or ensuring the protection of personal data, as well as intimidation of journalists. Additionally, according to the World Press Freedom Index for 2017 developed by Reporters without Borders, the Republic of Moldova fell down from 80th to 81st place, with a total score of 30.08 points.

Internationally, the fragile state of media freedom has been a topic of concern for our country's partners: in its latest conclusions on the Republic of Moldova issued on 26 February 2018 the EU Foreign Affairs Council explicitly mentioned that 'media freedom and pluralism are prerequisites for a democratic society', urging authorities to pursue reforms which 'address the concentration of media ownership and guarantee media freedom and pluralism'.

Concentration and lack of transparency in media ownership

According to the Moldovan Press Status Index 2017 Report published by the Independent Journalism Center, monopolization of the media market continued. The media market is dominated by two large trusts: the one owned by the leader of PDM ruling party and the one belonging to people close to President Igor Dodon. The same report also states that the few other existing media outlets are 'far behind in terms of equipment and power to compete with these trusts'. Although no single media owner could possess more than two broadcast licenses after the law had been amended, the new legal norm had a negli-

gible impact. In May 2017, the broadcasting licenses for channels Canal 2 and Canal 3 owned by the PDM leader Vladimir Plahotniuc were transferred to Telestar Media founded by Plahotniuc's PR adviser Oleg Cristal. This was done through the General Media Group (GMG) company. However, the address of said channels remained the same. IJC's monitoring reports on elements of propaganda, information manipulation and violation of journalism ethics in the local media reveal high similarities across much of the content produced by Prime, Publika TV, Canal 2 and Canal 3.

On the opposite side, the local media landscape is dominated by channels and portals affiliated with the Party of Socialists and President Igor Dodon (Accent TV, NTV, Aif.md).

A monopolized advertising market

In terms of sources of income, advertising is one of the few alternatives to direct funding by the owner. This helps avoid any potential interference with a publisher's editorial policy.

However, according to the experts, the reduced scale of the advertising market and the unwritten cartel-like agreement between the two big players on the market prohibit independent media outlets from having free access to large advertising companies. Thus, Casa Media agency, which according to the press is owned by Vladimir Plahotniuc, directs the available cash flow to the GMG Trust institutions affiliated with this politician. The other power player on the advertising market is Exclusive Sales House, part of the Exclusive Media Company Trust owned by Socialist MP Corneliu Furculita. Together, the two companies control about two-thirds of the market volume.

In January 2018, a group of media outlets (PRO TV Chisinau, RTR-Moldova, Jurnal TV and TV 8) filed a joint complaint to the Competition Council about the conclusion of a cartel agreement, whereby the financial flows are distributed in an 80% (Casa Media) to 20% (Exclusive

Sales House) ratio. The Council has yet to provide an official reply in regards to the matter.

Political bias and internal propaganda of politically affiliated media publishers

The concentration of media ownership and the monopolization of advertising revenue sources are the main factors which determine the vulnerable state the press finds itself in: most of the large publishers are politically biased and their editorial policy is directly linked to their owners' interests. Furthermore, note that during 2017 these outlets used propaganda-laden manipulative techniques when reporting on various topics of major public interest. The climax of the internal misinformation took place during the promotion of the campaign for the adoption of the mixed electoral system and continued throughout 2017, as well as during the first months of 2018, in all topics concerning the reforms promised by the government, evaluations of domestic policies by Western partners, the economic situation and the debt recovery in the 'billion-theft' case.

IJC's monitoring reports on elements of propaganda, information manipulation and violation of journalism ethics show that during 2017, as well as during the first quarter of 2018, the media outlets affiliated with various political groups favored both directly and indirectly certain politicians and parties: Accent TV and NTV Moldova – President Igor Dodon and PSRM, GMG-owned channels – PDM and its leader Vladimir Plahotniuc, whereas Jurnal TV favors PPDA headed by Andrei Nastase.

Both the above mentioned monitoring and media experts note that Moldova 1 public TV channel frequently reports on events of public interest in a manner similar to that of Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 and Publika TV. Aside from the common structure and the same angle of reporting news, the public channel has partaken in promoting projects and individuals close to PDM, including Silvia Radu, who was tacitly agreed upon by the said party to be running for mayor in the upcoming elections, as well as including the construction plan for the Chisinau Arena, which was announced by Vladimir Plahotniuc.

Meanwhile, political fights are taking place in Gagauzia for holding the control over the 'Teleradio Gagauzia' Public Regional Company. In December 2017, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, by vote of 19 members of People's Assembly, abolished the Public Company's Council of Observers. Local experts say

the fight is taking place between the Bashkan (Governor) of Gagauzia, Irina Vlah, and the People's Assembly, controlled by the democrats.

Questionable regulatory measures

The amendment of Article 11 of the Broadcasting Code, in force since 1 October 2017, stipulates that the audiovisual media shall broadcast local content for a daily minimum of eight hours. According to the Assessment study of the legal framework of regulation and self-regulation of media activity in the Republic of Moldova, this stipulation is 'necessary to promote and develop the local audiovisual content', which is yet in need of adjustments that would allow for a 'differentiated approach in regards to the mandatory local content share for broadcasters, or the production capacity of a local or regional broadcaster is different than that of a national one', the same way as 'it can be easier to obtain the required local content share in radio zones (...), than it is in the case of television broadcasters'.

The topic of personal data protection had caught the public's attention after a number of NGOs organized round tables with the representatives of the following state institutions: the National Center for Personal Data Protection (NCPDP), the Ministry of Justice, the Superior Council of Magistrates. The legal provisions proposed by the NCPDP were also discussed during the round tables. These provisions aimed at ensuring the protection of personal data that might threaten freedom of expression and restrict access to information of public interest. So far, the proposals made by the authorities have been considered inadequate by the Council of Europe experts and by the Moldovan media community, since the journalist's obligation to justify his/her request for information containing personal data could lead to a number of limitations of journalists' rights in the process of obtaining said information.

In October 2017, the Superior Council of Magistrates (SCM) decided to adopt a new Regulation on the manner of publishing judgments on the national portal of courts of law.

The draft stipulated that the identities of all individuals would remain anonymous in the texts of the judgments published on the website, which would have made it impossible for the public to find court decisions on the cases of high resonance, as well as find information in regards to how such cases were examined. The draft Regulation was, however, withdrawn

and replaced with the version put forward by the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), only after more than 70 journalists, media outlets and NGOs had signed a public call addressed to the SCM and had organized a protest .

Obstacles created by the authorities in ensuring the access to information

The Parliament's vote on the amendments of the Law on Access to Information, which were expected to pass the final reading, ultimately didn't take place, neither in 2017, nor during the first months of 2018. These amendments passed the first reading all the way back in July 2016 and were considered as a priority in the media community. Numerous public institutions and officials have repeatedly denied journalists access to information and to events of public interest, the most high-profile case being that of the photojournalist Constantin Grigorita. As a photo reporter of the Association of Independent Press (AIP), he was excluded from events organized by the President. His complaint against Igor Dodon and the Presidential Apparatus, which Constantin submitted to a court, was initially rejected, only to then be ultimately accepted and, after several delays, have the files be merged.

Even if there were lawsuits won by journalists, a number of public institutions continued to ignore their legal obligation to provide information of public interest, invoking various reasons in justifying their behavior. The Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) won a lawsuit against the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), which, during the 2016 presidential election campaign, limited reporters' access to the candidates' financial statements.

Although magistrates obliged the Commission to provide the data, CEC was refusing to comply for several months, having invoked personal data protection. Eventually, the institution offered 'fragmented' access to the lists of the presidential candidates' sponsors.

In December, AIP initiated the compulsory enforcement of SCJ judgment, whereby I.S. „Posta Moldovei' was ordered to provide journalists with information on 2014-2016 public procurements auctions. 'Posta Moldovei' previously refused to provide this data, stating that it was not a supplier of information of public interest.

RISE Moldova against the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is another high-profile case on the access to infor-

mation, won by the journalists at the Supreme Court of Justice. In March 2018, the Supreme Court obliged MIA to provide the reporters with data on ten individuals listed as wanted on a national or international level. This gave birth to a precedent in the ongoing struggle for access to information in the Republic of Moldova.

At the end of the last year, a group of journalists, well-respected by their peers, filed a request for interviewing the former Prime Minister Vlad Filat, who is currently imprisoned in Penitentiary No 13. The request, addressed to the Minister of Justice, the Deputy Director of the Department of Penitentiary Institutions and the Head of Penitentiary No 13, referred to the provisions of national and international law on the need to ensure transparency in a high-profile case of public importance. The request, however, was not admitted. Thus, both journalists and citizens of the Republic of Moldova were deprived of their right to access information of public interest of particular importance in the 'stolen billion' file, which was later transformed into a public debt.

In November 2017, the Ministry of Health issued an order obliging all healthcare facilities and subordinated agencies to coordinate with the Ministry the publication of information on social networks, the responses to journalists' requests or the attendance at TV shows.

Shortly afterwards, Silvia Radu, who had been appointed interim mayor of Chisinau, issued an identical order . Both documents caused an uproar in the media community, who saw in them an opportunity for abuse by civil servants with the purpose of controlling the media's access to information.

Attacks and intimidation of journalists and media outlets

During 2017 and early 2018, a number of journalists, especially investigative journalists, were regularly assaulted and harassed under various circumstances.

ZdG reporters were forbidden to shoot and take pictures in several public places. For instance, journalists were stopped and threatened at least twice while trying to organize a video shoot and take some photos near the Global Business Center building.

In February 2018, a female reporter from RISE Moldova was intimidated by the representatives of the 'Sfantul

Gheorghes' Charity Foundation and of the Caritate.md platform, after a video teaser had been published about an investigation in which both organizations were featured.

At the same time, a female journalist from the Center for Investigative Journalism was publicly admonished by the SCM; a reporter from Jurnal TV was verbally and physically assaulted by PDM MP Vladimir Hotineanu; a female photojournalist from Jurnal de Chisinau was physically assaulted by a store owner; a Publika TV shooting team was intimidated by protesters at an opposition rally; a Prime reporter was denied entry to a meeting held by the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), while TV8 and Jurnal TV reported a jamming of their programs in which Vladimir Plahotniuc was accused of ordering assassinations.

Also worth mentioning are actions of denigration and mocking undertaken by government supporters (trolls) on social networks against journalists Alina Radu and Cornelia Cozonac. The two journalists were the target of slanderous publications insinuating corruption and unprofessionalism on the basis of the reporters' physical appearance.

Regulatory authority used as a political tool

The Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC) delayed the examination of the application submitted by TV8 in regards to the license assignment, which was a prerequisite for completing the procedure of transferring ownership over the TV channel to an association mostly made up of journalists. It was only in mid-December 2017 that the application was finally approved.

Likewise, following a monitoring report on the observance of the local content share provisions, in force since 1 October, the BCC issued a series of warnings to seven TV channels, but failed to sanction other TV channels that committed the same infringements.

Media experts believed that the selective application of the law might be interpreted as an effort to shield PDM-affiliated TV channels.

Adjusting the legal framework, between delays and modest progress

In 2017, the Parliament set up a Working Group to adjust the national media law. During their first meeting in June, the members of the group outlined the following priorities:

develop the Strategy of Media Development in the Republic of Moldova; develop a new Broadcasting Code; develop the National Strategy on the Information Security; review/finalize the Law on the Access to Information (versus personal data protection, experience of EU countries in this field); develop a new Law on Press (both written and online); improve the Electoral Code as regards the covering of election campaigns in the media; improve the Law on Advertising; improve the Law on Competition; identify legal solutions in providing tax facilities for the local media content, etc.

Since then, the members of the group held several meetings, with not a single draft law having yet passed the final reading. It was only on 20 April 2018, that the draft Code of Audiovisual Media Services (an updated version of the Broadcasting Code) passed the first reading. In the same plenary session, MPs also passed the draft Law on the National Concept of Media Development in the Republic of Moldova.

Recommendations to the authorities:

- implement, as a matter of urgency, the outstanding provisions of the Government Action Program for 2015-2018 related to the media;
- ensure the genuine independence of the Broadcasting Coordination Council and of the public service broadcasters' councils of observers, including by applying some criteria for appointing members on the basis of professionalism, rather than political representativeness;
- refrain from exercising influence over editorial policies or from subordinating media outlets, especially a public TV channel, with media-owning politicians abstaining from treating media outlets as a subsidiary of their political party;
- adjust the Law on the Access to Information to the requirements of the digital era and to the e-government practices;
- observe the old provisions on the access to information, until new provisions are to enter into force, i.e., respond to the requests for information within the time period stipulated by the law and ensure the access to public information;
- adopt in due time draft laws developed by the Parliamentary Working Group, with absolute priority being given to the Broadcasting Code, which should

be in force well in advance of the 2018 Parliamentary election campaign;

- react to the objective and balanced journalistic investigations that expose cases of abuse;
- the Competition Council is to exercise its regulatory function in an efficient and impartial manner, as well as ensure the reestablishment of fair terms on the advertising market;
- investigate, objectively and without delay, the cases of intimidating journalists;

- effectively ensure journalists' safety.

Independent Journalism Center

Association of Independent Press

Association of Electronic Press

Association of Independent TV Journalists

Association of Investigative Reporters and Editorial Security

Center for Investigative Journalism

'Access-info' Center

Media Center for Youth

Press Freedom Committee

Independent Journalism Center

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